

Couples don't have the same experience when both work from home

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In dual-earner couples, working from home may be a better deal for husbands than wives in some ways, according to two related studies of workers in China and South Korea.

The research showed that both [husbands](#) and [wives](#) completed more [family](#)-related tasks when they worked from home versus the office. However, when wives worked from home, husbands completed fewer family tasks than when their wives worked in the office. Wives did not complete fewer tasks when husbands worked from home.

In addition, wives in both studies felt increased guilt about failing to accomplish housework and spending time with their families when they did more work at the office. In men, that result was found in one study.

"We found that men and women don't have the same experience working from home," said Jasmine Hu, lead author of the study and professor of management at The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.

"There are still some gendered differences in how they manage their job and [family responsibilities](#)."

The study was published recently in the journal [*Personnel Psychology*](#).

The researchers did two studies, both during the COVID-19 pandemic. One study involved 172 married dual-earner couples in mainland China who had at least one child. That study was done near the beginning of the pandemic in April and May of 2020.

The second study was done in South Korea, later in the pandemic from June to August 2021. This involved 60 dual-earner couples, some with children and some without.

In both surveys, all participants completed two surveys each day for 14 consecutive workdays. Each husband and wife reported their work-from-home status and the amount of work and family tasks they completed.

They also completed various measures, which could include [work-family conflict](#) and family-work conflict, how much guilt they felt toward their families and their work, and their psychological withdrawal from work and family.

Findings showed that when husbands had flexible work schedules, wives completed significantly more work tasks when working from home than in the office. When wives had inflexible work arrangements, husbands completed significantly more family tasks when working from home.

"These findings suggest that husbands could help remote working wives when they have more flexible work schedules and do more family tasks when their wives have more rigid work schedules," Hu said.

Overall, the results suggested that when the boundaries between work and family time are blurry, dual-earner couples feel the conflict.

Findings showed that when employees (both husbands and wives) worked from home, they increased how much work they completed around their home and family, but that increased their feelings of inter-role conflict, psychological withdrawal from work and feelings of guilt concerning work for their employer.

"Managers should form realistic expectations about how much work their remote working employees can effectively handle and show more understanding of the home working situations of dual-earner couples," Hu said.

Hu said the results suggest husbands with flexibility in scheduling [work time](#) can provide more support for their wives to complete their remote work tasks.

"Organizations and managers should give their male employees more

flexibility when possible so they and their families can better adapt to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic," she said.

While many of the work-from-home policies this study investigated were put into place because of the pandemic, Hu said that things won't go back to the way they were when the pandemic is over.

"COVID-19 forever changed how we work. Remote working is going to become much more of a norm," she said.

"People have really gotten used to the benefit of working from home and many won't want to go back to the office full time."

Hu said she sees hybrid work as the best possible future for working couples.

"This will allow employees to have the flexibility they get from working at home, while also having the opportunity to interact more with colleagues at the office, which can increase collaboration and inspire creativity and innovation," she said.

More information: Jia (Jasmine) Hu et al, Double challenges: How working from home affects dual-earner couples' work-family experiences, *Personnel Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/peps.12559](https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12559)

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